

Belemu Vhahangwele Honoured for Excellence in Agricultural Extension Research at the 58th SASAE Conference



Ms Belemu Vhahangwele, a postgraduate student in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, University of Venda, South Africa recently presented a paper co-authored with Professor Isaac B Oluwatayo on 30 June 2025 at the 58th South African Society of Agricultural Extension (SASAE) conference. As a participant, she had the privilege of engaging with other researchers, professionals and experts in agricultural extension. SASAE is an organisation dedicated to promoting agricultural extension services in South Africa, with the focus on sustainable agriculture, improved livelihood and food security.

The 2025 SASAE conference theme was “Transforming Agricultural Extension for Sustainability, Climate-smart and Resilient Rural Development”. The conference co-hosted with Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa took place from 29 June to 04 July 2025, at the Emperors Palace, Kempton Park, Johannesburg, Gauteng. The conference also incorporated the first Agricultural Extension week, highlighting the importance of extension services in South Africa.

Ms Vhahangwele Belemu presented a paper titled “Postharvest Loss Challenges among Smallholder Fruit Crop Farmers in Limpopo Province: Insights from Vhembe District”. The presentation was well received, and she was honoured with the 3rd Place Award for Best Presented Paper, further validating the paper’s relevance and quality. The best paper award recognises outstanding contributions to agricultural extension, such as innovative research, excellence in practice and impactful projects. As a recipient of the certificate, the paper contributes to understanding the challenges faced by tree crop farmers and potential solutions. The paper contributed to the exchange of ideas and experiences among agricultural extension specialists, researchers, and industry stakeholders. It highlighted the need for targeted interventions to support smallholder farmers in reducing postharvest losses. It also sparked collaborations and potential partnerships with researchers and practitioners in the

field. Key recommendations from the paper include implementing comprehensive training programmes focused on best practices in harvesting, handling, and storage; enhancing access to proper storage facilities and pack house to reduce spoilage; Improving road infrastructure to facilitate timely transportation of produce to markets; Providing farmers with access to credit to enable investments in better technologies and practices; and fostering stronger market connections and information dissemination as this will empower farmers to make informed decisions, ultimately improving their livelihoods and food security in their communities.

Participants at the conference include National Department of Agriculture Representative, Agricultural extension specialists, researchers, and practitioner, scholars in agricultural sciences and related field, and Representatives from government departments, private sector companies, and NGOs involved in Agriculture and Rural Development.

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